

Message Text

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AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION NATO
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 13373

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINT GW UR WB
SUBJ: THE SOVIETS AND GERMANY IN THE ELECTION YEAR

REF: A) LONDON 13098 (NOTAL); B) BONN 13459 (NOTAL);
C) BONN 7926 (NOTAL); D) MOSCOW 1943

BEGIN SUMMARY. IT APPEARS TO US THAT THE SOVIET APPROACH
TO GERMAN ISSUES IN THE POST-QA PERIOD HAS BEEN DOMINATED
BY FOUR HABITS: RECORD MAINTENANCE, COCERN FOR THE SOVIET-
GDR RELATIONSHIP, PREPAREDNESS TO DEAL WITH EVERY FRG
GOVERNMENT IN POWER, AND A PREFERENCE FOR THE SPD/FDP COALITION
AS THEIR GOVERNAMENTAL INTERLOCUTOR. THE 1976 ELECTIONS HAVE
PERHAPS GIVEN THEM SPECIAL PROBLEMS: THE COALITION IS NOT
UNITED IN ITS APPROACH TO OSTPOLICTIK, AND THE QUESTIONS OF
WHOM TO SUPPORT AND WHAT THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS ON OSTPOLITIK
MAY BE NATURALLY ARISE. GIVEN THESE UNCERTAINTIES, SOVIET
ACTIONS, BY THE RECORD, HAVE BEEN NEITHER VERY HELPFUL NOR
VERY HOSTILE. IN A YEAR THAT WAS SURE TO BE DIFFICULT,
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ESPECIALLY ON BERLIN ISSUES INVOLVING THE EC AND CSCE, THEY
HAVE LET THEIR BASKET II CONFERENCES PROPOSAL SLIDE BUT
PROTESTED BERLIN PARTICIPATION IN THE EC PARLIAMENT, AND
HAVE LET SUPPORTED THE GDR AND KEPT THIER OWN SIDE OF THE RECORD

STRAIGHT AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY, BUT WE ARE IMPRESSED WITH THE LOW-KEY AND PRO FORMA NATURE OF "NEGATIVE" SOVIET REACTIONS AS WELL AS WITH THE EFFORTS TO BE POSITIVE, AND, IN GENERAL, WE FIND BEATTIE'S JUDGMENT THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE BEEN ACTING IN TRADITIONAL FASHION TO BE PERSUASIVE. ON THE WESTERN SIDE, IT SEEMS TO US, THE SOUNDEST COURSE IS TO KEEP OUR OWN RECORD CLEAR AND MAINTAIN SUPPORT FOR THE FRG, BUT ALSO TO AVOID ATTRIBUTING TO THE SOVIETS A ROLE IN THE ELCTION CAMPAIGN THEY DO NOT APPEAR, AT PRESENT, TO BE SEEKING. END SUMMARY.

1. IT APPEARS TO US THAT THE SOVIET APPROACH TO GERMANY HAS BEEN DOMINATED BY FOUR HABITS, AT LEAST IN THE POST-QA PERIOD. FIRST AND FOREMOST, PERHAPS, THE SOVIETS ARE DEVOTED TO THE PRACTICE OF KEEPING THEIR SIDE OF THE RECORD STRAIGHT, ESPECIALLY ON BERLIN, BUT ACROSS THE SPECTRUM OF GERMAN ISSUES. OSTPOLITIK AND THE QA HAVE GERMAN ISSUES MOVED MATTERS OFF CENTER STAGE CONSIDERABLY AND MADE RECORD MAINTENANCE THE CENTER OF GERMAN POLICY, FOR THE SOVIETS AT LEAST. AT A MAXIMUM, PERSISTENT STRAIGHTENING OF THE RECORD, AS THEY SEE IT, PERMITS THEM TO SCORE POINTS; AT A MINIMUM, TO AVOID LOSING POINTS. INATTENTION OR PASSIVITY, IN MATTERS OF THIS IMPORTANCE AND SPECIFICITY, IS THE LAST THING TO BE EXPECTED OF THEM.

2. SECOND, THIS INCLINATION IS REINFORCED BY THE OVERARCHING IMPORTANCE OF SOVIET-GDR RELATIONS FOR THE USSR'S WHOLE POWER POSITION IN EUROPE. THE CHARACTER OF THE RELATIONSHIP MAY HAVE CHANGED AS THE GDR HAS GAINED INTERNATIONAL STATURE, BUT THE GDR REMAINS THE WEAK SISTER IN GERMANY, AND EAST GERMAN INSECURITY AND SOVIET SUPPORT ARE AND WILL BE CONSTANTS. IF ONE ASSUMES THAT THE BORDER INCIDENTS, TO THE EXTENT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN FORTUITOUS, ARE "MADE IN GERMANY" RATHER THAN IN THE USSR, THEN THE SOVIET REACTION CAN BE SEEN AS THE MINIMUM NECESSARY TO KEEP THE TIME-HONORED PRACTICES OPERATIONAL, GIVEN THE IMPASSIONED ELECTORAL ATMOSPHERE IN THE WEST.
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3. THIRD, LIKE ANY GREAT POWER THE SOVIET UNION HAS INTERESTS, IN GERMANY AND ELSEWHERE, WHICH ARE MORE PERMANENT THAN ITS FRIENDS. IT MUST BE PREPARED TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH ANY WEST GERMAN GOVERNMENT TO DEFEND AND PROMOTE THOSE INTERESTS. HENCE THE SOVIETS CAN BE EXPECTED TO USE WHAT INFLUENCE THEY HAVE TO PUSH EVENTS IN FAVORABLE DIRECTIONS, BUT THEY WILL NOT OVERRATE THAT INFLUENCE, AND ABOVE ALL THEY WILL SEE GERMAN STATES, RATHER THAN GERMAN PARTIES, AS THEIR MAJOR AND NATURAL INTERLOCUTORS, AND PURSUE POLICIES WHICH PUT THEM IN A POSITION TO DO BUSINESS WITH EVERY GOVERNMENT IN POWER.

4. FOURTH, THEY WILL PREFER THE SPD/FDP COALITION AS THEIR

GOVERNMENTAL INTERLOCUTOR IN THE FRG, AS THE AUTHOR AND EXECUTOR OF OSTPOLITIK AND EVEN AS THE "NATURAL" MAJORITY GOVERNMENT. BUT THEY WILL NOT DO SO REGARDLESS OF THE COSTS, AND ESPECIALLY NOT IF THE OCST IS A SERIES OF "CONCESSIONS TO THE RIGHT" WHICH IS LIABLE TO VITIATE OSTPOLITIK UNDER ANY GOVERNMENT, BY ERODING PUBLIC SUPPORT OVER THE LONG TERM AND SADDLING THE VICTOR IN OCTOBER WITH COMMITMENTS WHICH COULD IN FACT TURN OSTPOLITIK INTO A HOLLOW SHELL.

5. EQUIPPED WITH SUCH HABITS, THE SOVIETS HAVE PERHAPS HAD SPECIAL DIFFICULTIES IN FORMULATING A COHERENT APPROACH TO THE FRG IN THIS ELECTION YEAR. THEIR PENCHANT FOR DEALING WITH STATES AND THEIR PREFERENCE FOR STRONG GOVERNMENTS AS INTERLOCUTORS MAKE WESTERN ELECTIONS HARD FOR THEM TO HANDLE IN THE BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT THE COMPLEXITIES OF 1976 MUST APPEAR MORE SERIOUS THAN USUAL. UNLIKE 1972, THE SPD/FDP COALITION IS NOT UNITED IN ITS APPROACH TO RELATIONS WITH THE EAST, BEGINNING WITH THE SOVIET UNION. RATHER, THE FOREIGN MINISTER (AND FDP PARTY CHAIRMAN) HAS CHOSEN OSTPOLITIK TO DEVELOP A DISTINCT POLITICAL PROFILE FOR HIS PARTY. AS THE RECORD READS FROM HER, A KIND OF TAKE-IT-OR-LEAVE-IT ATTITUDE TOWARD THE THREE AGREEMENTS UNDER NEGOTIATION WITH THE USSR (TOGETHER WITH DOUBT ABOUT SOVIET COMMITMENT TO DETENTE IN GENERAL) HAD EMERGED II FRG OFFICIAL CIRCLES BY MAY AT LEAST (BONN 7926), WELL BEFORE THE SERIES OF ABRASIVE INCIDENTS BEGAN.
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6. OVER THE MIDDLE AND LONG TERM, A PROFILE FOR THE FDP MAY BE ADVANTAGEOUS FOR OSTPOLITIK, BY SUPPORTING THE VIABILITY OF THE COALITION. IN THE SHORT TERM OF 1976, HOWEVER, THE SOVIETS MUST ASK THEMSELVES WHOM THEY WILL BE SUPPORTING IF THEY SUPPORT THE COALITION, AND WHETHER THE LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES OF OSTPOLITIK'S EMERGENCE AS AN ISSUE WITHIN THE COALITIONS, AS WELL AS BETWEEN IT AND THE OPPOSITION, MAY NOT BE DELETERIOUS. THIS UNCERTAINTY, IT SEEMS TO US, IS FAR MORE LIKELY TO EXPLAIN REDUCED SOVIET SUPPORT FOR THE COALITION, BY COMPARISON WITH 1972, THAN CONSIDERATIONS INVOLVING PORTUGAL AND ITALY LIKE THOSE SUGGESTED IN BONN POLITICAL CIRCLES (BONN 13459, PARA 10).

7. GIVEN THESE UNCERTAINTIES, THE RECORD OF SOVIET ACTIONS IS MIXED, AND CERTAINLY NOT HELPFUL, BUT ALSO NEITHER SURPRISING NOR HOSTILE. AS WE POINTED OUT IN OUR THOUGHTS ON THE BERLIN POLICY ASSESSMENT (MOSCOW 1943), 1976 WAS SURE TO BE A DIFFICULT YEAR IN SOVIET-GERMAN RELATIONS. THE DIPLOMATIC AGENDA WAS FULL OF POTENTIALLY CONTENTIOUS ISSUES (INCLUDING EC EXTENSION); IT WAS TO BE AN FRG ELCTION YEAR; THE GDR WAS LIABLE TO HAVE STRONGER CLOUT WITH THE SOVIETS. MOST OF THE DIFFICULTIES APPEAR TO US TO HAVE BEEN MAINLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THESE FACTORS.

ALTHOUGH THE SOVIETS HAVE ALLOWED BREZHNEV'S PROPOSAL FOR BASKET II-TYPE CONFERENCES (WITH THEIR AUTOMATIC FRICTION OVER BERLIN) TO SLIDE OVER FOR ANOTHER YEAR IN THE ECE FORUM, THE PROBLEM OF BERLIN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT HAS PROGRESSED TO THE POINT WHERE IT IN FACT PROVOKED A SOVIET PROTEST; THE SOVIETS HAVE SUPPORTED GDR NASTINESS, UP TO TRANSIT ROUTE DISTURBANCES; AND THEY HAVE IN FACT KEPT THEIR SIDE OF THE RECORD STRAIGHT IN EVERY INSTANCE WHERE IT COULD POSSIBLY HAVE SEEMED OPEN TO DOUBT.

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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8. AT THE SAME TIME, WE ARE IMPRESSED, LIKE EMBASSY BONN, NOT ONLY WITH THE BRUSHFIRE CHARACTER OF SOME RECENT INCIDENTS, AND NOT ONLY WITH SOVIET EFFORTS TO KEEP SMILING (MOST STRENUOUS IN THE MAY 22 STATEMENT), BUT WITH THE LOW-KEY, LARGELY PRO FORMA NATURE OF THE "NEGATIVE" SOVIET MOVES. PROTESTS TO AMBASSADORS AND MFA STATEMENTS ARE NOT HEAVY ARTILLERY IN THE SOVIET ARSENAL. IT IS TRUE THAT TASS TOOK THE UNUSUAL STEP OF PUBLISHING THE MFA'S STATEMENT ON THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT IMMEDIATELY, BUT ONE PLAUSIBLE MOTIVE COULD HAVE BEEN TO KEEP THE RECORD STRAIGHT IN SELF-DEFENSE, GIVEN THE RAPID AND HOSTILE LEAKAGE OF THE PROPOSAL FOR A QA ANNIVERSARY EXCHANGE INTO THE PRESS.

9. FINALLY, EVEN ON THE MORE OR LESS "FOLKLORE" ISSUE OF NKP SUPPORT FOR THE SPD, NKP CHAIRMAN MIES' STATEMENT ON THE FRG-GDR BORDER "PROVOCATIONS", AS REPORTED IN THE WEEKEND SOVIET PRESS, IMPLICITLY SUPPORTED THE SPD AND ATTACKED

THE DCU/CSU: IF THIS TREND CONTINUES, IT MAY EVEN INDICATE
AN ELEVENTH-HOUR RETURN TO 1972 TACTICS.
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10. ON BALANCE, THEREFORE, ALTHOUGH THE RECORD IS FAR FROM
CLEAR AND THE EVIDENCE FAR FROM COMPLETE, WE ARE INCLINED
TO AGREE WITH BEATTIE'S HORSEBACK JUDGMENT (LONDON 13098)
THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE BEEN ACTING IN TRADITIONAL FASHION,
WITHOUT A PALPABLE UPSURGE OF INTEREST IN GERMAN QUESTIONS.
RECOGNIZING THAT THEIR ABILITY TO CONTROL EVENTS IS LIMITED
IN MOST CASES TO POST HOC INTERVENTION WITH CONSEQUENT MIS-
UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR INTENTIONS IN THE FRG ELECTION
ATMOSPHERE, THEY HAVE SOUGHT TO KEEP THEIR SIDE OF THE LEDGER
CLEAR, IN THE LOWEST POSSIBLE KEY. THE SOUND COURSE FOR
THE WEST, IT SEEMS TO US, IS TO MAINTAIN OUR OWN CLEAR APPROACH
TO THE ISSUES, AND OUR SUPPORT OF THE FRG, WITHOUT MAKING
THE SOVIETS MORE OF AN APPLE OF DISCORD IN THE ELECTION
THAN THEY ARE ALREADY, CERTAINLY THEY DO NOT DESERVE A
DEGREE OF INFLUENCE THEY DO NOT APPEAR TO BE SEEKING AT THE
MOMENT.
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